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**Book of abstracts**

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# The influence of referent status on the Dutch presentational alternation

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## Abstract

This paper presents the results of a pilot study examining referent status as a possible factor governing the alternation between the various Dutch presentational constructions (from now on: PCs). PCs are constructions that convey an utterance that has a *sentence focus* reading (Lambrecht 1994) and that serves to introduce a new referent or a new event into discourse (Venier 2002). Cross-linguistically a number of PCs is frequently attested, among these are the non-prototypical cleft (from now on: NPC), the syntactic inversion with filler insertion construction (from now on: SIFIC) and the prosodic inversion construction (from now on: PIC) (cf. Lambrecht 1994, Lambrecht 2000, Lambrecht & Polinsky 1997, Sasse 1987, Sasse 2006). Also in Dutch these three PCs are present:

(1) Er is een man die met je wilt praten. (NPC)

There is a man that to you wants to talk.

(2) Er wilt een man met je praten. (SIFIC)

There wants a man to you to talk.

(3) EEN MAN wilt met je praten. (PIC) (capitals indicate non-contrastive sentence accent)

A MAN wants to you to talk.

‘There is a man that wants to talk to you.’

Very little research has been conducted on the functional differences between these various types of PCs and on the factors governing this alternation. This paper proposes the hypothesis that one of the factors governing the alternation is the referent status of the entity that is introduced. While all PCs share a *sentence focus* articulation (cf. *supra*), this does not exclude possible differences in the cognitive informational state of the entity that is introduced, since the notion of ‘new information’ on the utterance level cannot be equated to the notion of ‘new information’ on

the level of the individual constituents (Prince 1992, Vallduví 1993, Chafe 1994, Lambrecht 1994). According to Lambrecht (1994) 5 possible cognitive informational states (*brand-new unanchored*, *brand-new anchored*, *unused*, *accessible* and *active*) can be distinguished. A referent introduced by a PC can be of each of these states, except for *active* (cf. Ward 1999).

In the pilot study 10 Dutch native speakers were told a story and were asked to imagine themselves as the protagonist of the story. At various points during the story the experiment leader interrupted the story and asked the participant “what would you say now?”, after which the participant had to answer in a spontaneous fashion. This happened both in situations where the use of a PC was pragmatically required (target situations) as well as in situations where a PC could normally not be produced (fillers). The procedure was practiced first in order to ensure that the participants felt at ease with the method and to avoid the use of a too formal, unnatural language variety. The story was specifically designed for this study and included situations where the referents that had to be introduced were *brand-new* as well as situations where the referents were *unused* or *accessible*.

The results of the pilot study confirmed the hypothesis. Participants overwhelmingly used PIC for introducing referents that were *unused* and *accessible*, while using mostly NPC and SIFIC for the *brand-new* referents, e.g.:

(4) JE HOND heeft mijn sleutels genomen.

YOUR DOG has my keys taken.

‘Your dog took my keys.’

(5) SOFIE heeft gans de thermoskan over haar arm gegoten.

SOPHIE has entire the thermos over her arm poured.

‘Sophie poured the entire thermos over her arm.’

(6) Er is net een mevrouw overreden hier recht voor de deur.

There is just a woman hit here right outside the door

‘A woman just got hit here right outside the door.’

(7) Er was een kind dat eigenlijk volledig van stoel naar stoel aan het springen was.

There was a child that actually completely from chair to chair jumping was.

‘There was a child that was actually jumping from chair to chair.’

While the overall number of NPCs produced by the participants was limited, its conditions of usage were very similar to that of SIFIC, suggesting a close resemblance between the two PCs, at least for what concerns the informational component. This could be due to the fact that both PCs contain the accessibility marker *er* (cf. Grondelaers, Brysbaert, Speelman & Geeraerts 2002). The results also indicated that there are more PCs available in Dutch than have hitherto been noticed; speakers also produced PCs that combined NPC and SIFIC and PCs that combined SIFIC with a perception verb:

(8) Er liep hier een klein gastje dat ik nog nooit heb gezien.

There walked here a little guy that I before never have seen.

‘There was a little guy walking here that I have never seen before.’

(9) Er loopt een dwerg door de straat die een pony aan het bereiden is.

There is.going a dwarf through the street that a pony riding is.

‘There is a dwarf going through the street that is riding a pony.’

(10) Ik zag net dat er een bom is gevallen aan het station waar jij nu de trein neemt.

I saw just that there a bomb has dropped at the station where you now the train take

‘I just saw that a bomb has been dropped at the station where you take the train.’

Further research along these lines with a larger number of participants will follow this pilot study and will be conducted in the following weeks.

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